

The
Rathgeb
Memorial Organ
at
Deer Park
United Church
Toronto

The Rathgeb Memorial Organ in Deer Park United Church is the latest in a long series of important events that have marked the recent progress of organbuilding in America. It therefore seems appropriate to review briefly the background that has contributed to the creation of this instrument.

The revival of interest in the organ as a musical instrument in its own right began in America in the late 1920s. The pressure for reform was a result of an awakening among a small number of American organists, some with European training, to the fact that the orchestral concept of the organ that dominated organbuilding through the first quarter of this century produced instruments lacking most of the tonal characteristics necessary for adequate performances of the great literature for the organ that had been accumulating over a period of nearly 300 years. In Europe, Albert Schweitzer had been long pleading for reform and, as early as 1906, he decried the inadequacy of the new instruments of his time to cope with the polyphonic textures of his much beloved Bach.

Although a genuine reform movement began in Europe shortly after World War I in response to Schweitzer's ceaseless efforts, there was at first no direct connection between the European and the American organ renaissance. The Europeans rather quickly discovered that the only way to accomplish what was required was to return to the basic principles of organbuilding so magnificently demonstrated by the old Masters of the Art. They applied themselves in the early years of their revival to a diligent search for the underlying truths that made the old instruments seem so appealing and so appropriate to their task 100 to 200 years after their original construction.

In America it was thought that the most characteristic and therefore the most important feature of the great old organs was their brighter and more colorful tone. So, the revival in America in its early years consisted mainly of a brightening process in which brilliant mixtures and fiery reeds were introduced in great profusion, along with a scattering of color-creating mutation stops so characteristic of the classical French instruments.

While the movement in America certainly produced a revival of interest in the organ, it did not, in the first years, produce an appreciation of the truly functional nature of classical organ tone in the communication of musical ideas. Thus, the new instruments, preoccupied as they were with brilliance and color, were, in fact, reformed romantic instruments. They were capable of doing those dramatic things required by the romantic literature, but they were still not capable of presenting the polyphonic literature because they were lacking in the transparency of texture and the tonal cohesion which are actually the more important characteristics contributing to the timelessness and essentially musical quality inherent in the work of the old Master builders. Nevertheless, the American movement, in the years before World War II, did much to acquaint the general public and the architectural fraternity with the fact of the organ's existence and the position of physical prominence it must have in the building it is to serve if it is to be heard to proper advantage.

AFTER WORLD WAR II, a few American musicians and organbuilders became more conscious of the inadequacy of the pre-war reformed instruments in the so-called American-Classic style. Gradually, a second wave of pressure for improvement developed. Today, enlightened organists and organbuilders are no longer willing to settle for the half-way measures that were accepted even ten to fifteen years ago. The rapidly expanding movement in America to adopt into modern instruments the basic construction and tonal principles embodied in the work of the Master builders of the 17th and 18th centuries in North Germany, Holland and in France has gained considerable momentum. Its musical goals are now virtually the same as those that have impelled the European reform for four decades. This approach to the organ requires:

1. "Tracker" key action using direct mechanical linkage between the keys and the pipe valves to provide responsive and touch-sensitive control of the speech of the pipes as opposed to the comparatively sluggish, inaccurate and uncontrollable response of all electric and pneumatic systems;

2. Voicing technique using nickless flue pipes with open toes and reed pipes with thin tongues all on low wind pressure to produce efficient, responsive pipework with a functional, transparent tone and a light and tractable key action;
3. Pipes scaled entirely by empirical methods to produce the best balance between the various ranges within each individual stop, between the stops within each division, and between the divisions themselves, as opposed to the artificial pipe relationships induced by the mathematically based scaling methods of the romantic builders;
4. Slider or other type of key-chambered wind-chests on which all pipes of the same note within each division stand on a common wind channel to produce a prompt, easy speech and a well integrated ensemble;
5. Tonal design based on traditional principles and the specific requirements of the various periods of the classical literature for the organ, to enable stylistically appropriate performance of this music on modern instruments;
6. Placement of the organ wherever possible along the central or long axis of the room but always completely within the room it is to serve rather than buried in chambers in the walls;
7. Complete encasement of each division of the organ on all sides except the front in order to blend, amplify and project the tone and to provide additional differentiation in the tone of the individual divisions through the characteristic resonances resulting from the unique dimensions of each enclosure.

Organs built along these lines are ideal for the polyphonic literature which comprises the major portion of the music for the organ, and for choral accompaniment and leading congregational singing. They are artistically genuine and make no attempt at imitating other instruments.

IT WAS THE EXPRESS WISH of Charles Rathgeb, donor of the organ that the instrument in Deer Park United Church adhere strictly to this high ideal in every detail. It was built by Casavant Frères Limitée of St-Hyacinthe, Québec, under the direction of Lawrence Phelps who also created the tonal design of the instrument, in close collaboration with William Wright, organist of the church, and Alan Jackson, the Toronto representative of Casavant Frères. Lawrence Phelps is well known for his numerous instruments in various styles to meet the specific and widely divergent musical requirements of individual religious and educational groups. His instruments in the strict North German and in the strict French Classical styles are considered to be

unique in North America for stylistically accurate performances of the literature of these two schools.

Mr. Phelps's understanding of the essentials of these two contrasting and basically incompatible classical tonal concepts, and the broad experience he has gained in working out the tonal details of many projects in each style separately, have moved him gradually to develop a new style of his own which is without precedent in its ability to present the works of both schools with virtually unqualified success. Concerning this new style, Mr. Phelps comments:

"In developing a tonal scheme for the performance of either the German or French Classical literature, the location of the traditional stops within the scheme is as important as the actual choice of stops. In other words, "where" becomes as important as "what".

"The organ is essentially a polyphonic keyboard instrument. Therefore, the requirements of the North German polyphonic literature must be of primary concern in shaping the tonal resources of any instrument. Of course, the foundation of the design is a well developed principal chorus on each of two or three manual divisions with an equally well developed pedal division. Each of the several choruses, with its complement of flute and reed stops, must be complete enough to stand alone with integrity in the scheme, and the contrast between the various divisions must be well established in respect to pitch, tonal color and dynamic level. This is best accomplished by the method known as the "Werkprinzip" which emerged in North Europe in the work of the Master builders of the 17th century. Each division of the organ thus has a different basic pitch, Hauptwerk 16' or 8', Positiv an octave higher, and the third division an octave higher than the Positiv, etc., and the tonal composition of the instrument is reflected in its physical arrangement and clearly visible in the visual design.

"Compromise with traditional placement of the stops and divisions should be made with great caution if the requirements of the literature are to be met effectively. For example, a secondary chorus placed "under expression" is not really an adequate substitute for a proper Positiv in filling the expectations of the polyphonic repertoire.

"Once the polyphonic requirements have been fully realized in the tonal structure, those special features demanded by the French Classical literature can be considered. It is in designing for this important body of organ music that the location of the various timbres becomes



especially important, in order that the overall scale, perspective and shape of these works be preserved in present-day performances. It is impossible to begin to create anything like the tonal perspective required for the French literature with the only Cornet or Trompette located in the swell box, or when the only Cornet effect must be obtained from the Positiv mutations, as is so common in North American instruments. Therefore, when it is required to do justice to this extraordinarily colorful music, I place all of the basic stops of the French tradition in the positions this tradition requires. When this has been worked out, and incorporated into the basic *Werkprinzip* design, we need only work out suitable compositions for the mixtures, resolve to use classical voicing techniques for all flue and reed stops, and to keep the wind pressure as low as possible, short of being ineffective; the clarity and transparency of texture required for the German polyphonic music, plus the timbres and disposition essential to the French school, is then guaranteed. Once an instrument has been built in this manner, one need only select his registration according to the traditions dictated by choice of music, and the organ does the rest.

"Two interesting secondary effects result from this way of working. Instruments of this type do not suffer so much in a reasonably dry acoustical environment, although they cannot survive in a really dead situation any better than any other organ. And, this type of tonal design and scaling produces an ensemble that serves most of the major romantic works so well that, when listening to this music played on it, we are likely to forget the essentially classical inspiration of the instrument."

The instrument in Deer Park United Church is the latest and largest of Mr. Phelps's instruments in this new style, but several others, including two that are larger, are already underway in the mechanical-action organ workshop at Casavant Frères. This instrument was planned essentially for the authentic performance of the works of the North European school such as Buxtehude and Bach and their contemporaries, and while the tonal scheme has been expanded to include the basic requirements of the works of the French Classical school such as those of Clérambault and the Couperins, the only concession to the romantic composers is in the design of the division called "Schwellwerk", played from the top keyboard. Concerning the general nature of this organ, Mr. Phelps has this to say:

"During the meetings with Mr. Charles Rathgeb which I was privileged to have during the early stages of planning the new Deer Park United Church instrument, I was impressed with his frequently emphasized concern that this organ should be not only a fitting memorial to his wife, Eileen, and a useful and beautiful adornment of his church, but also a contribution to and enrichment of the musical life of the City of Toronto.

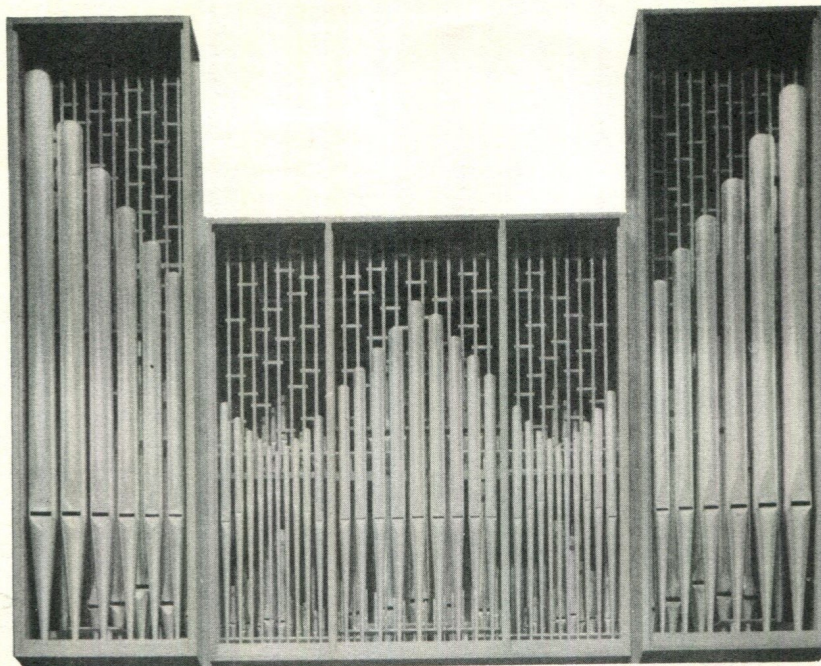
"His interest in his munificent gift by no means ended with the expression of it; rather, he had taken great pains before the final decision was made, to acquaint himself intimately with the modern organ, to listen to a considerable number of different instruments, and generally to seek to make his decision on as well-informed basis as was possible.

"It was his express wish, for example, that the organ be a mechanical-action instrument, and he was well aware of the completeness of the tradition which he was adopting in stipulating this — its encasement, its effective placement and so on — and the enormously varied possibilities for music-making of the highest and most diverse order, of which an organ of this concept is capable.

"His forward looking attitude made collaboration with him a privilege and doubly a pleasure, and it is my hope that the instrument will in fact be used in as many ways as this generous-hearted and far-seeing man so much wanted.

"For my part, I have made every effort to produce an organ which, reflecting Mr. Rathgeb's own achievements, as well as his hopes concerning this particular project, represents the highest "state of the art" at this time.

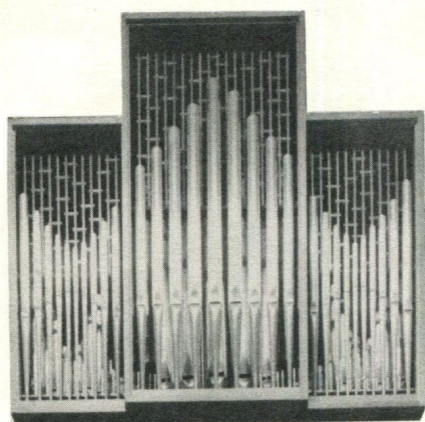
"Our new instrument for Toronto is actually a new type of organ, being one of a series that will be culminated in a 73-stop instrument to be completed in about 18 months in a large church in Southern New England. Because it really makes no attempt to imitate anything from a former period but the effectiveness of the old instruments in accomplishing their purpose, it should not be compared with previous instruments except in the actual performance of music. Nevertheless, because the existing literature and registrational traditions require that the stops and the divisions of the organ be named and composed according to certain time-honored standards, comparing the composition of this instrument with older and historical instruments and practices is probably inevitable. So, the use of German nomenclature in this



HAUPTWERK

16' Gedacktpommer
 8' Prinzipal
 8' Rohrflöte
 4' Oktav
 4' Offenflöte
 2 2/3' Quinte
 2' Oktav
 8' Kornett V
 1 1/3' Mixtur VI
 1/2' Scharf III
 16' Fagott
 8' Trompete
 4' Klarine

The List of Stops

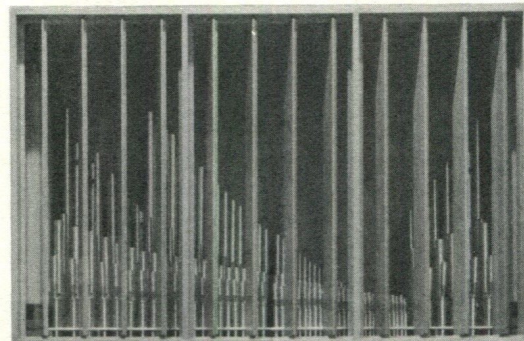


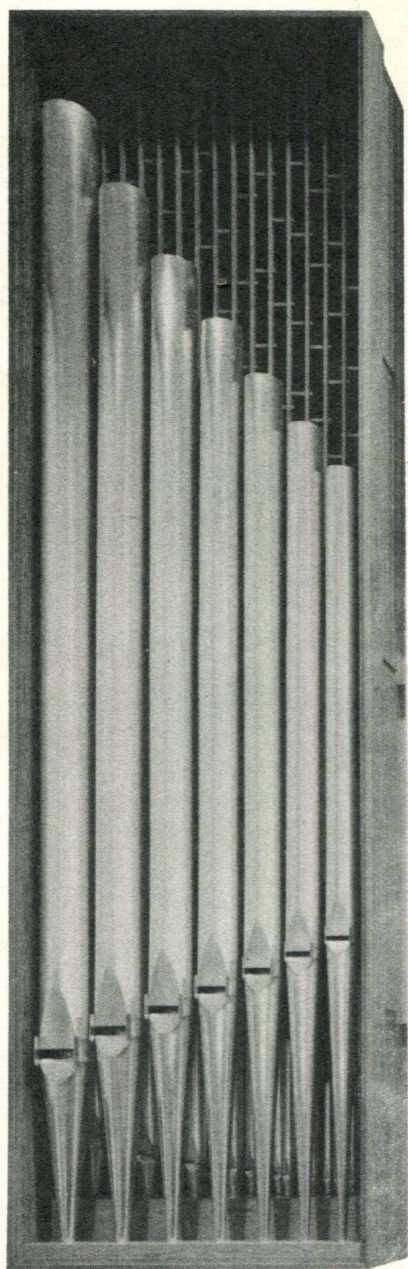
OBERWERK

8' Gedackt
 8' Quintadena
 4' Prinzipal
 4' Koppelflöte
 2 2/3' Nasat
 2' Oktav
 2' Blockflöte
 1 3/5' Terz
 1 1/3' Quintflöte
 1' Scharf IV
 1/4' Zimbel III
 8' Krummhorn
 Tremulant

SCHWELLWERK

8' Gedacktfllöte
 8' Salizional
 8' Vox coelestis
 4' Spitzflöte
 2' Prinzipal
 1' Sifflöte
 2 2/3' Sesquialtera II
 2/3' Kleinmixtur IV
 16' Rankett
 8' Vox humana
 Tremulant





PEDAL

- 16' Prinzipal
- 16' Subbass
- 8' Oktav
- 8' Bordun
- 4' Choralbass
- 4' Rohrpfeife
- 2' Nachthorn
- 5 1/3' Rauschpfeife III
- 2' Mixtur V
- 16' Posaune
- 16' Fagott
- 8' Trompete
- 4' Schalmey

organ will trigger a predictable series of reactions. Careful scrutiny of the Hauptwerk, Oberwerk and Pedal will reveal that, so far as the stoplist is concerned, the compromises with the North German "Werkprinzip" brought about by accommodating to the requirements of good French practice are minor. For example, the Sesquialtera is placed in the Schwellwerk and the Positiv (Oberwerk) has a full complement of independent mutations. The Schwellwerk combines to some extent the typical offices of the German Brustwerk and the French Classical Récit. A minor compromise with classical practice is the addition of a pair of string stops – an essential element in the romantic Récit and the English Swell. The classical Récit and Brustwerk were mainly solo sections and the Schwellwerk certainly preserves this tradition. The choice of reeds is perhaps a little unconventional. The "expressive shutters" with which the Schwellwerk is fitted are truly a romantic concession if they are used for the usual so-called expressive effects, but when used either fully opened or fully closed, they enable this division to serve a dual role, substituting also as a completely enclosed Echo – a cherished French Classical feature. The French Echo was a solo division like the Récit and often duplicated the sounds of the Récit. Thus, even this feature, normally thought of as a romantic device, serves to broaden the classical scope of this instrument."

The key action for this organ is entirely mechanical throughout. The stop action is electrical with electronic controls and the combination action is the most advanced electronic system yet installed anywhere in an organ using solid-state circuitry throughout. The only conventional electrical contacts in the organ are those behind the combination pistons. There are five combination pistons for the stops of each individual division of the organ, and five general combination pistons controlling all of the stops and couplers.

The tonal resources of the instrument consist of 48 stops composed of 74 ranks of pipes distributed in four divisions playable from three manual keyboards of 56 notes each and a pedalboard of 32 notes. The total number of pipes in the organ is 3,557.

The keyboards for the Oberwerk and Schwellwerk can be coupled to the Hauptwerk, and all three manual keyboards can be coupled to the Pedal.

The wind pressure of the Hauptwerk is 60 mm (2 3/8"); the Oberwerk, 55 mm (2 3/16"); the Schwellwerk, 55 mm; and the Pedal, 70 mm (2 3/4").

The Rathgeb Memorial Organ, presented to Deer Park United Church and dedicated there on September 22, 1970 was planned by the late Charles C. Rathgeb as a memorial to his wife, Eileen Elizabeth, who died on September 22, 1967.

When, before the instrument could be completed, Mr. Rathgeb died early in 1969, his son, Charles C. Rathgeb Jr. requested that the organ be dedicated to the memory of both his parents.

Charles Casper Rathgeb married Eileen Elizabeth Cunningham of Montreal in 1921 when he was manager of the Canadian Comstock Company in that city. In 1934 Mr. Rathgeb purchased the Canadian company and moved its headquarters to Toronto where he remained its president until his death.

The Rathgeb family had two children, Kathleen, who died in 1951 and Charles C. Rathgeb Jr. who is a member of Deer Park United Church, the congregation his parents joined in 1936.

Mr. Rathgeb had a twofold purpose in presenting the Casavant organ to his church . . . to honour the memory of his beloved wife and to give his church "a new and meaningful future".

There could scarcely be a more fitting instrument to the praise of God and the memory of a generous family than the Rathgeb Memorial Organ.

